

TRAVEL

Edited by JANE MEMMLER

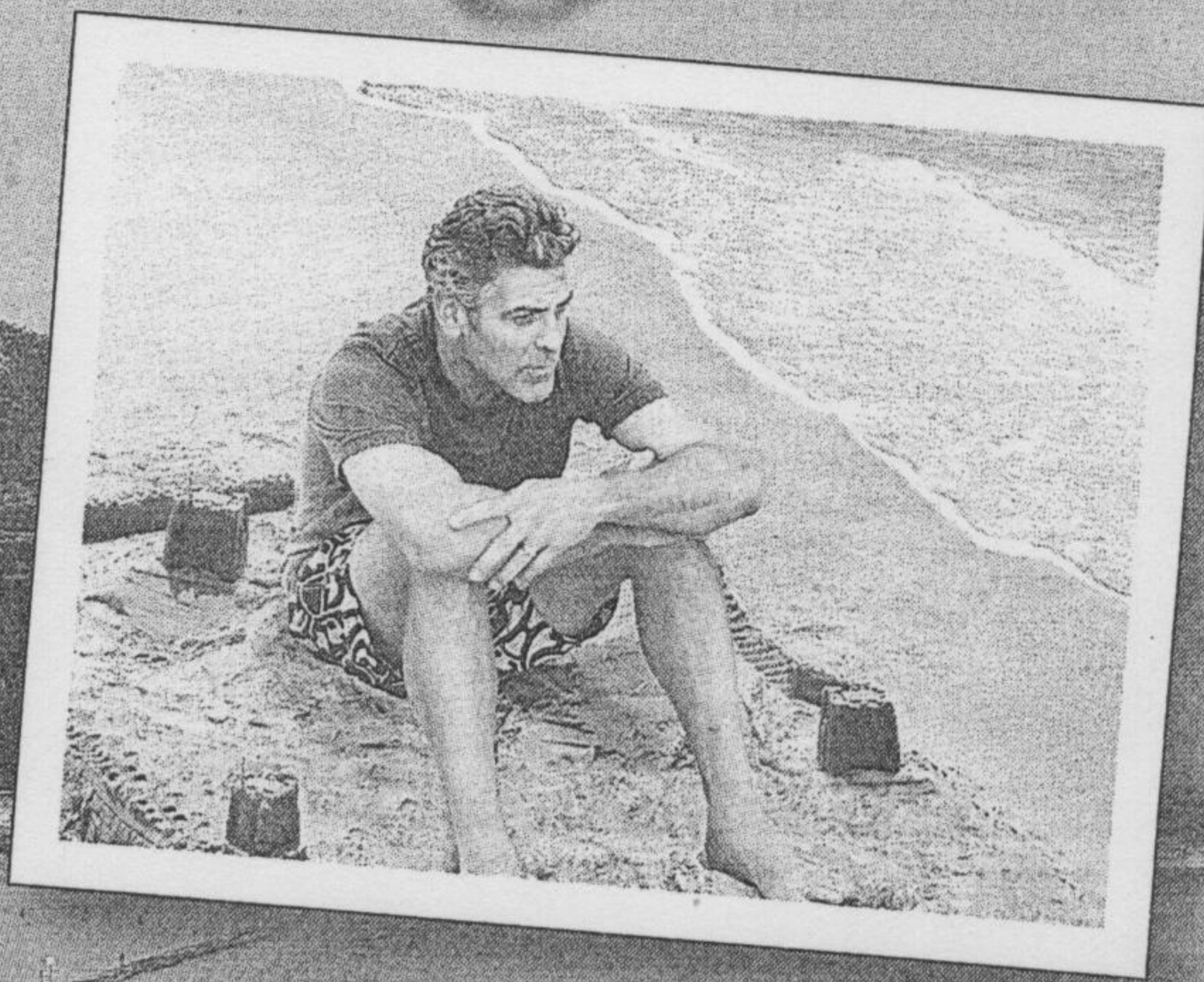
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Hawaii's starring role



ALOHA: Waikiki Beach in the shadow of the extinct Diamond Head volcano. Inset: George Clooney as Matt King in *The Descendants*

Picture: HARALD SUND/Getty

OLIVIA GREENWAY visits the iconic paradise islands that are the amazing location for George Clooney's new film *The Descendants*

ON STAGE a string trio is playing, just audible above the hubbub of the guests on the outside terrace of the hotel. In front of the band a hula dancer gently moves to the music. I am entranced. "That's Kanoe Miller, by the way," the waiter tells me. "She's performed here every night for the past 28 years. She's Hawaii's most famous dancer." If I were in Las Vegas there would be fanfare and razzmatazz. Here in one of Waikiki's most sophisticated hotels, the Halekulani, it's all wonderfully understated and light years from a brash, mythical Hawaii of pular culture; Mai Tai cocktails, grass skirts and loud shirts.

Hawaii consists of a string of six main islands, nearly 3,000 miles off the west coast of America.

Formerly known for its sugar and pineapple production, the islands depend primarily on tourism and film-making, the latter worth £260 million last year. Among the biggest productions of recent times is *The Descendants*, which stars George Clooney in a Golden Globe-winning performance.

Based on a book by Hawaiian resident Kaui Hart Hemmings, the film attempts to show its more authentic side and is set on the islands of Oahu and Kauai, both of which I'm here to visit.

I start off in Honolulu, Oahu, home to the international airport and where Clooney's character

Matt King has a law business. At first glance world-renowned Waikiki Beach is surrounded by a skyscraper jungle of identikit hotels and anonymous restaurants and bars. Dig deeper however and there is so much more to see.

Alongside the glorious sandy beach are manicured lawns, every designer shop imaginable and a huge array of reasonably priced restaurants.

I visit a couple of the notable historic beachfront hotels such as the Royal Hawaiian, built in 1927, with its Mai Tai circular bar overlooking the sea; the Halekulani Hotel with its House Without A Key terrace bar, where I see Kanoe Miller; and the Hau Tree Lania restaurant where

TURN TO PAGE 73

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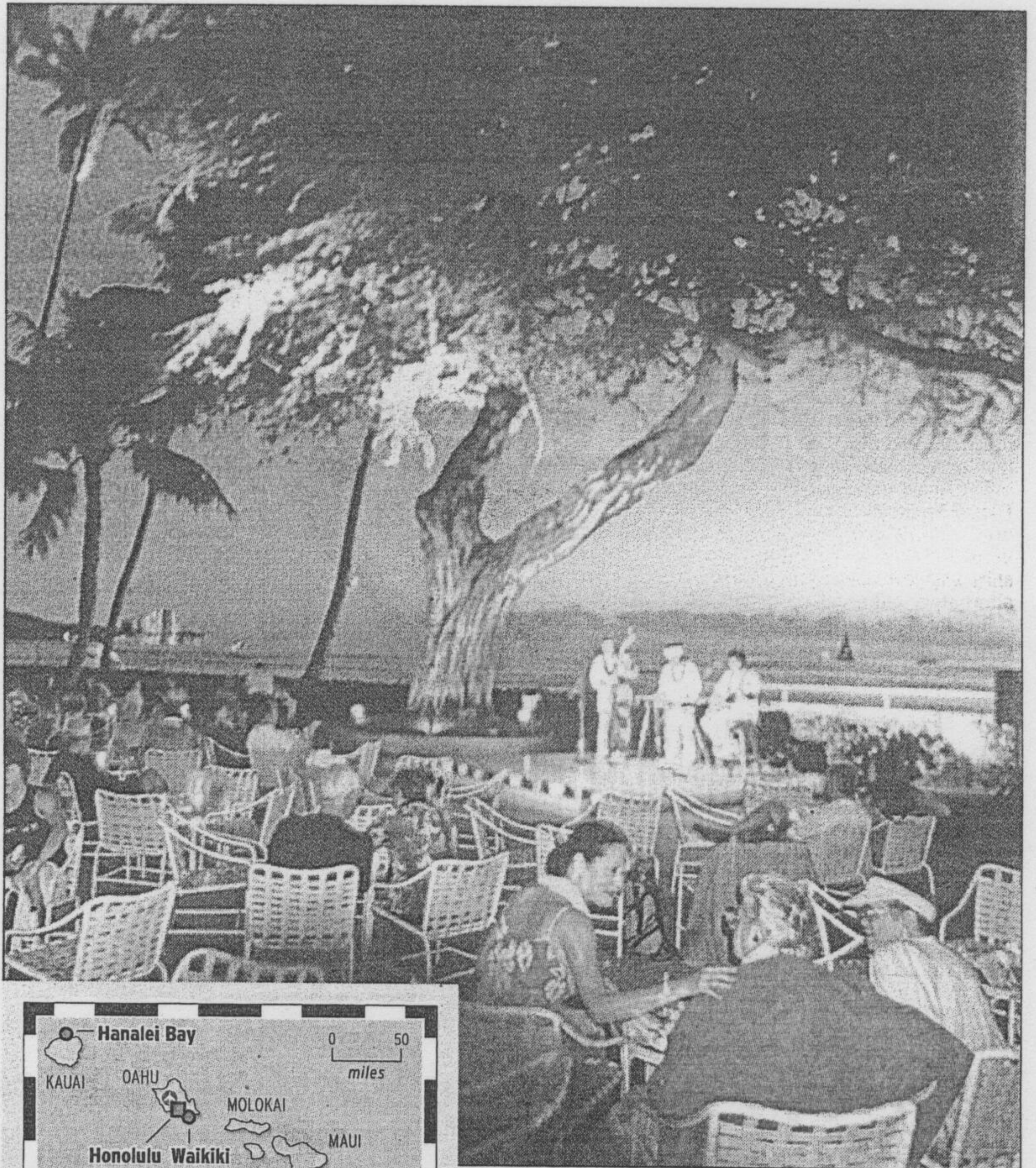
★ The first UK tour operator specialising in Montenegro has been launched ahead of new direct flights to the country this spring. Explore Montenegro (0207 118 1002/exploremontenegro.com) offers more than 40 holiday villas and apartments, catering for everyone from couples to large groups. Montenegro Airlines begins flying from Gatwick to the coastal city of Tivat in March, meaning holidaymakers no longer have to fly to northern neighbour Croatia and drive across the border. Explore is offering a 10 per cent discount on bookings made before the end of January (applies to all holiday costs excluding flights, which can be arranged for £189 return).

★ Never one to rest on its laurels, the EDF London Eye (0871 781 3000/londoneye.com) this weekend launches a new in-capsule experience. Six touch-screen Samsung Galaxy tablets will be available in every pod of the Thames-side attraction providing key information on landmarks, as well as 3D views of buildings, enabling passengers to "look inside" the likes of the Houses of Parliament and St Paul's Cathedral. The tablets are included as part of the standard price. Tickets from £18.90, child (4-15) £9.90.

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CHARLOTTE CIVIL



DRINKING HOLE: The House Without A Key bar, Waikiki

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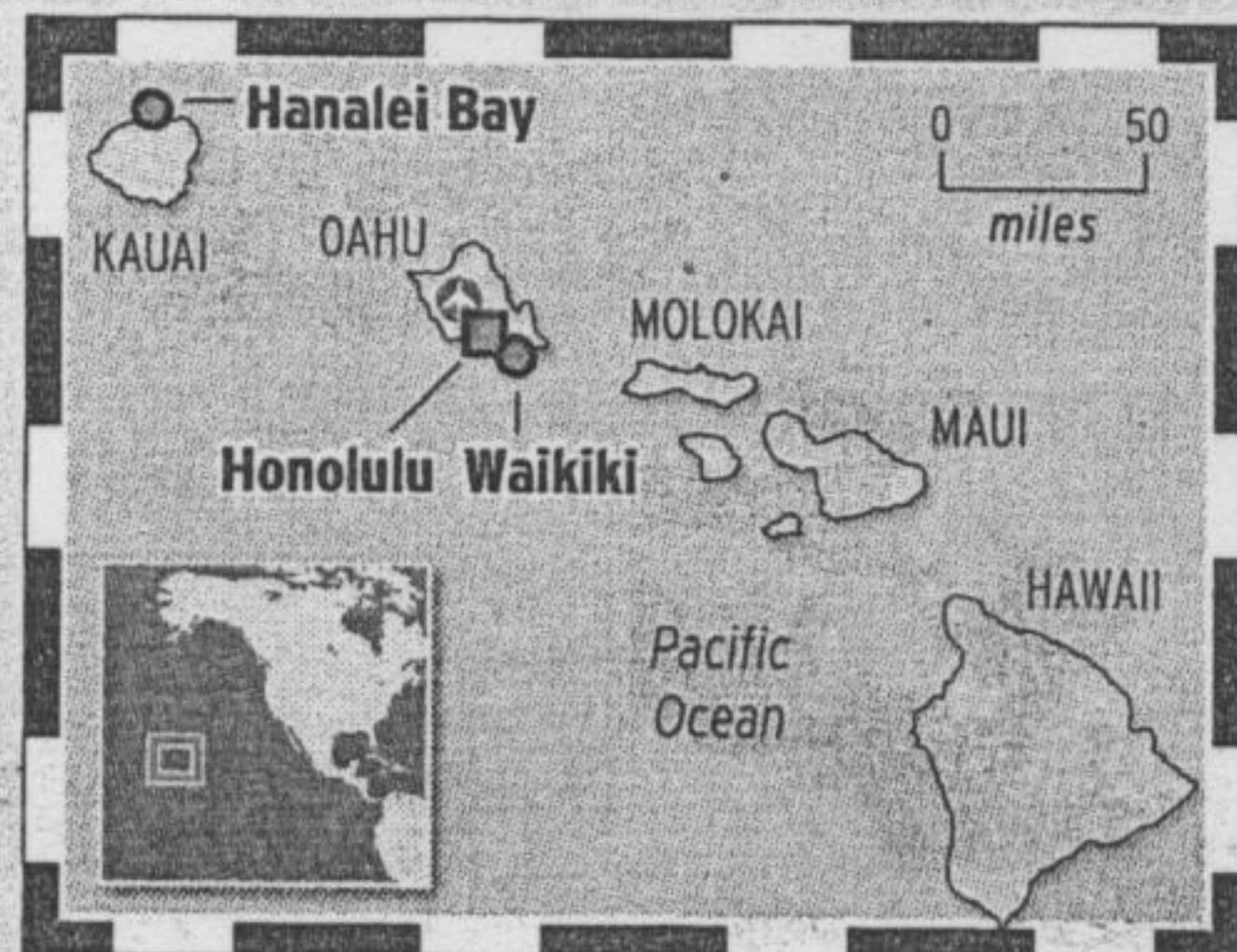
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From silver screen to golden beach

FROM PAGE 71

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his South Sea Tales.

The next morning I head out to buy a shirt inspired by the scene in Clooney's film where the characters attend a business meeting all wearing Hawaiian shirts. Authentic shirts are made from good quality cotton with distinctive, slightly muted patterns, not the brash designs we see in European holiday resorts.

The Aloha shirt hails from Hawaii and is responsible for the dress-down Friday idea. It's hot here (up to 30C year round) so the shirt was developed as a practical alternative to the collar and tie.

Suitably kitted out, I set off on a drive to Diamond Head, the site of an extinct volcano. I'm keen to explore but a member of a film crew stops me apologetically. They're shooting Hawaii Five-O, an update of the Sixties series.

We get chatting and he tells me his background is Korean, German and Hawaiian. Another resident meet is proud of his English; Chinese and Hawaiian heritage. It's probably no coincidence that America's first mixed-race president Barack Obama, with a white



RELAXING: Rihanna in Hawaii this week

American mother and a black Kenyan father, is also from Hawaii.

In the film Clooney's character, King, realises the importance of family. This makes him change his mind about selling off some inherited land to developers.

With no other scheduled means of getting between the islands, I take a 20-minute flight to Kauai. It could not be more different from Waikiki. It's unspoilt, like old-time America, with one-street towns, brightly coloured houses with picket fences and battered old trucks.

I snake my way up the east coast towards the St Regis Princeville resort. This iconic hotel clings to a rock face with uninterrupted views across Hanalei Bay. Several

scenes from the film were shot here, the most notable in the palatial Presidential Suite. J-Lo, Alicia Keys and Ben Affleck have all stayed here, and pop star Rihanna is a big fan of the islands.

IN THE film King takes a jog along Hanalei beach. I followed in his footsteps, but at a leisurely pace. I can't resist some shave ice (very fine, snow-like flavoured ice) from Shave Ice Paradise, which was a favourite destination with The Descendants film crew. I choose vanilla. It's bright blue and dyes your tongue but is the most popular choice.

The nearby Tahiti Nui bar was the location for another scene. A real

local hangout, it's charmingly scruffy with battered tables and chairs and a resident guitarist. I sit at the bar and mingle with some of the regulars who doubled as extras in the film.

"We get lots of film folk here," says one. "It's no big deal. We just let them be." Letting things be is my lasting impression of Kauai as I return to Oahu for my flight home.

The vitality and natural beauty of Hawaii leaves an indelible mark on this first-time visitor.

Clooney may be tipped for Oscar glory, but there's no doubting the real star of this film.

● The Descendants is released on Friday, January 27.

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